



## Something to Smile About

### *Visiting Dogs at Nursing Homes*

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# Something to Smile About: Visiting Dogs at Nursing Homes

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Problem: Dementia: BPSD  
Caregiver bournout

Question: How may visiting dogs counteract?  
Aim: Hypothetical model  
Method: Selective review of 5 fields

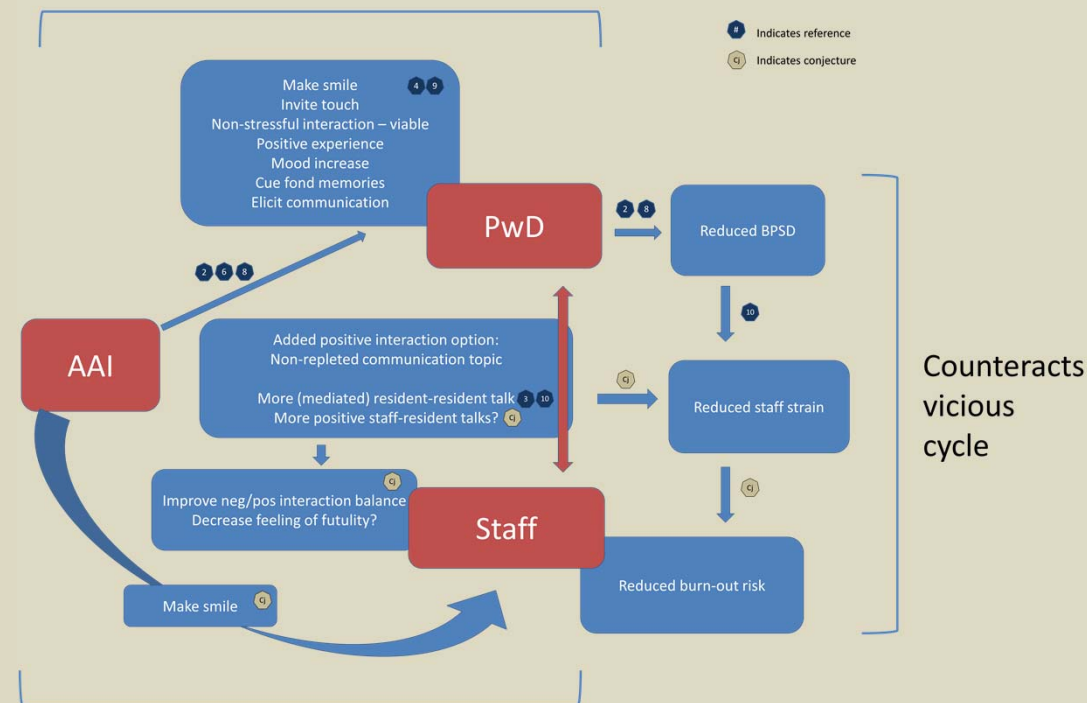
Needs of persons with dementia (PwD) in long term care	Many residents in nursing homes have dementia and are dependent on staff for psychological and social needs. Dementia is a progressive disease. As the condition progresses, PwDs' activity options narrow down, and opportunities for pleasant encounters decrease.
Behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD)	Concurrently, BPSD such as apathy or agitation increase <sup>5</sup> . BPSD are a consequence of dementia but influenced by context, e.g., stimulus deprivation, or stress. Up to 90 % of BPSD is suggested to stem from poor care rather than dementia itself <sup>5</sup> .
Wellbeing and burnout in dementia care staff	BPSD is a strain on caregivers and suggested to be a major cause of burn-out in nursing home staff <sup>1</sup> . Burned-out staff provides poorer care <sup>1,5</sup> , which in turn increase symptoms of dementia.
Psychosocial effects of Human Animal Interaction	<b>Provided that people like dogs</b> , seeing dogs cause smiling, touching lowers stress, interaction increases oxytocin. Dogs also catalyse positive perceptions of strangers and increased propensity to talk (possibly about the dogs, and memories they cue). Some studies also report reduced loneliness, enhanced mood, reduced depression <sup>4</sup> .
Animal Assisted Interventions in nursing homes (AAI)	PwD – even in late stages – take interest in visiting dogs <sup>2,9</sup> . Frequently reported effects of dog visits include reduced resident agitation <sup>2,8</sup> , apathy and general problem behaviour <sup>10</sup> , reduced noise in the ward <sup>8</sup> , and improved social interaction <sup>2,6,8</sup> . Staff distress with BPSD is also reduced <sup>10</sup> .

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If considering an animal assisted intervention, please consult dog welfare and best practice guidelines<sup>7</sup>

## Improvement for resident



## Relief for staff

### Evidence, conjecture and research implications

Many pathways of the model, notably direct effects of AAI on residents, are supported by several studies. Studies with strong designs and large Ns are still sparse but some exist. Staff implications are underresearched. Most staff related pathways in the model are conjectures or based on informal observations. Future studies should address whether AAI increases positive staff resident-communication, decreases staff feelings of futility, and reduce staff burn-out risk.



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